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Patriarchy/Matriarchy versus Blood Quantum Cultural Significance as Evidenced in Hawaii Land Commission Grants

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# Patriarchy/Matriarchy versus Blood Quantum

## *Cultural Significance as Evidenced in Hawaii Land Commission Grants*

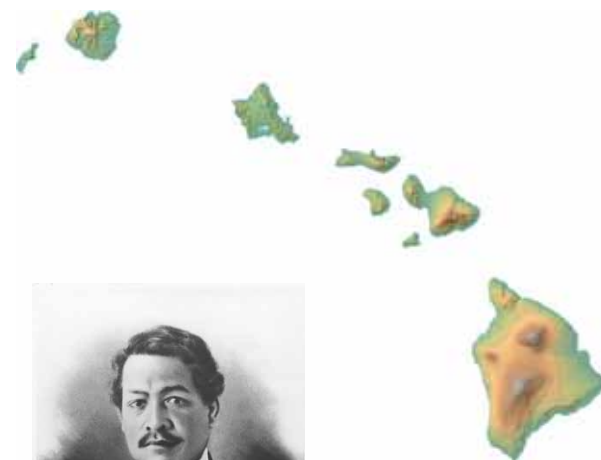
UPDATE ON CSW FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SEED GRANT

**D**uring the land division of 1848 (Great Mahele), both Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians were given the ability to make a formal claim to land in the Hawaiian Islands,<sup>1</sup> seemingly regardless of gender. While the West was a predominantly patriarchal society at this time, lineage purity and 'godliness' were the markers of Hawaiian society. While many scholars have pointed to the Mahele as a major turning point in the land distribution system (that is, land was taken from the Hawaiian people and 'redistributed' to non-Hawaiians), it may have also been an unusual opportunity for gendered resource distribution: namely formal, governmentally-recognized land ownership by women. Hawaiian society, while predominantly class-based within a patriarchal system, did allow females positions of power.

To explore the gendered dimensions and consequences of this land governance transformation, the overall project in which I am engaged has three main goals: (1) to determine the gendered dimensions of land claims in the records of awarded Mahele land grants; (2) to explore the race/ethnicity dimensions of claims made by Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians; and (3) to determine to what extent Hawaiian culture may have influenced the Western migrants in the Islands regarding gender mobility via access to land ownership.

### EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP ON GENDER, INDIGENEITY, AND PROPERTY

Exploring land rights and property claims in historic indigenous contexts provides a unique opportunity for theorizing feminist indigeneity. In the mid-1800s, no property



The Great Mahele was signed into law by Kamehameha III in 1848.

right was more significant than that of the right to succession of an estate.<sup>2</sup> Much of the feminist interest in property rights, however, has focused on women as objects of property rather than as subjects.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, studies on the Pacific Island region tend to overlook gender issues, especially when examining land tenure. The majority of studies on the Mahele, for example, mainly focus on the distribution of land between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians prior to and after the completion of the land grant application review period.<sup>4</sup> Indigenous literature has typically minimized gender studies, often because of the emphasis on “historical cultural significance”; namely, that patriarchal/matriarchal social relations are a significant part of the indigenous culture.<sup>5</sup> That is, within the indigenous literature, gendered power relations often are conceptually bundled into “culture,” thereby minimizing the issue of gender inequalities.

Indigenous scholarship has highlighted the differences between community “ownership” of land (otherwise conceptualized as “use rights”) and Western notions of individualized ownership. Communal “ownership” provided for greater access for women, because such rights were provided regardless of sex or age. Thus, women had rights to the

land by virtue of their membership within the communal society, and typically not directly attributable to a dependent relationship on men, inheritance, or purchase.<sup>6</sup> (Within the Hawaiian case, dependency may have had more to do with familial tenancy, which may have privileged male descendants.) Context-specific (historical and geographical) analysis of gendered land claims would aid in clarifying these gendered indigenous dimensions of property.

Though the Hawaiian culture historically privileged “pure” lineages – a direct descendant of the gods – gender roles were culturally embedded in daily life (male/female foods and customs for gender separation and mingling, for example).<sup>7</sup> We hypothesize that during this period of cultural change in the Hawaiian Islands due to Western influence, women may have been able to effectively modify their position within society through property claims and purchase.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Historically, the prevalent societal hierarchy privileged males making claims on land. However, we posit that during the Mahele, which constituted a significant transformation in governance and cultural practices concerning land, other societal norms may

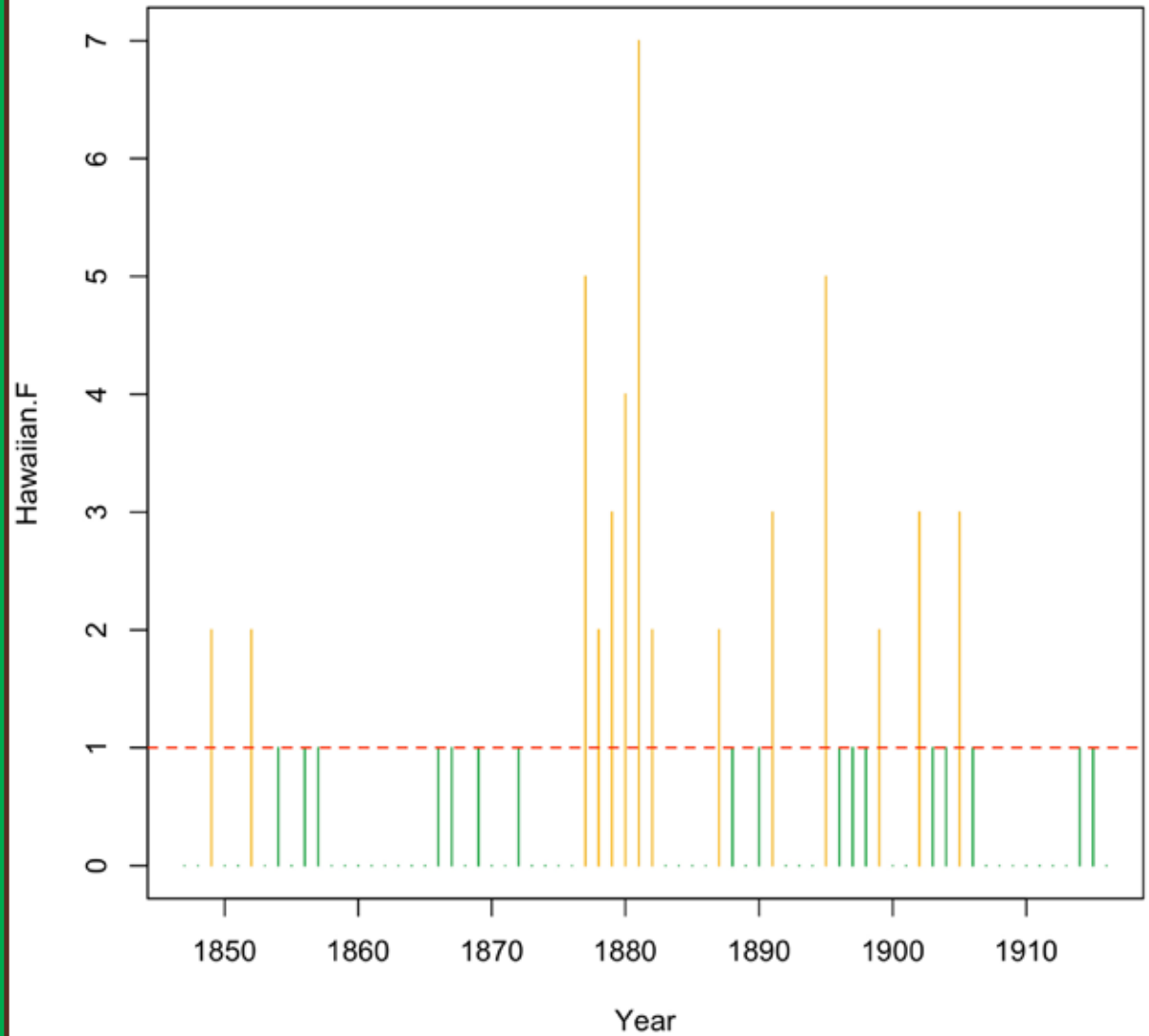
have become less stable as well (that is, gendered social norms concerning land ownership). To explore this assertion, for this seed grant, we explored the following research questions: (1) were Hawaiian women able to purchase land?; and (2) what were the differences in Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian female land purchases?

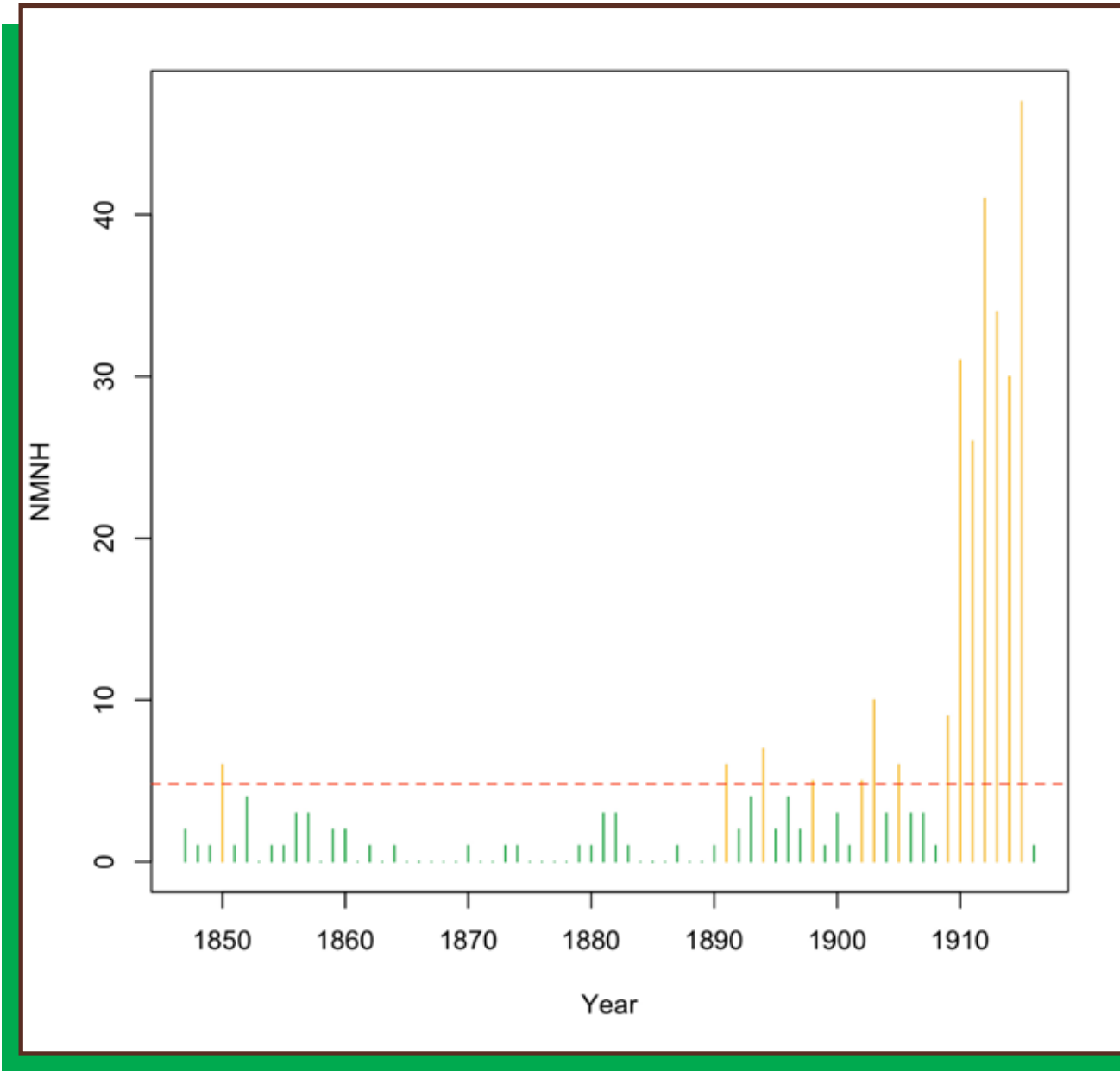
## DATA

Approximately 6,500 purchase records<sup>8</sup> were analyzed using a typology of purchasers: Hawaiian, Potentially Hawaiian, and Non-individuals. “Hawaiian” was identified via names that were clearly Hawaiian; “Potentially Hawaiian” included individuals that had Hawaiian names, or partial Hawaiian names, though could not be verified as “Hawaiian” due to potential of marriage. The category “Non-individuals” included any purchase that was not by an individual; this category could include private businesses as well as public works purchases.

The gendered aspects of the purchases were grouped in a similar fashion – Hawaiian Female purchasers were identified via a “(w)” next to their name (for wahine, the Hawaiian word for female) since Hawaiian names are typically not gender-specific. “Non-Hawaiian

Figure 1: Hawaiian Female purchases  
Total purchases per year (average: ~0.9)

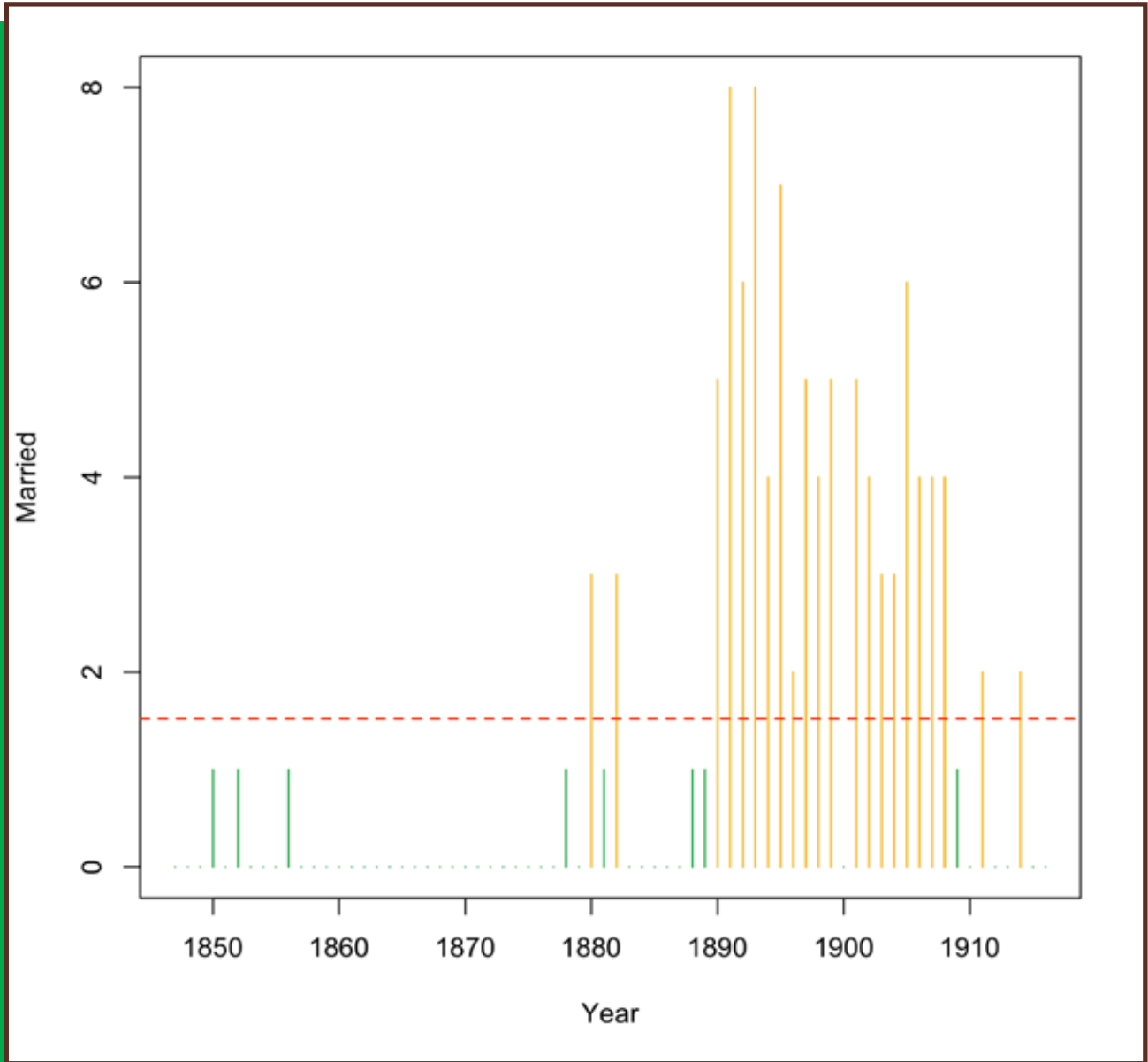




**Figure 2: Non-Married, Non-Hawaiian Female purchases, or NMNH**

**Total purchases per year  
(average: ~4.8 purchases)**

Figure 3: Married (Non-Hawaiian)  
Female purchases  
Total purchases per year  
(average: ~1.5 purchases)



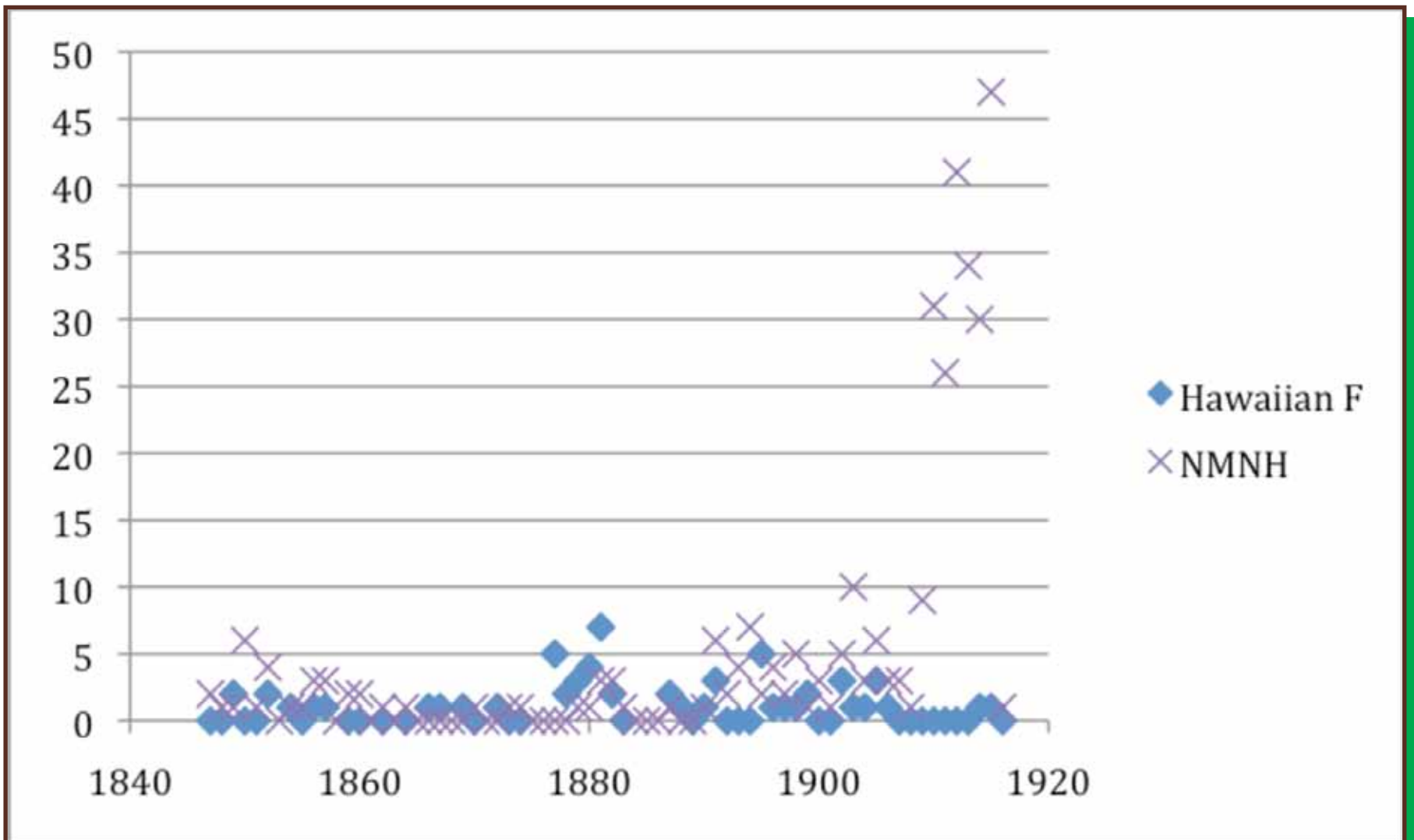


Figure 4: Hawaiian Females compared to Non-Married Non-Hawaiian (NMNH) Females

Total Purchases Per Year

Non-Married” included all other names that would typically be considered female, though did not include any names that were gender ambiguous such as Francis, Leslie, or Kelly. It is possible that “Non-Hawaiian Non-Married” includes individuals who are Hawaiian though whose names are not overtly Hawaiian potentially due to intermarriage or to baptism. The category “Mrs.” includes all individuals that recorded this title, though Hawaiian royalty who were married are not included in this list. It is also undeterminable whether any of these individuals are widows.

While Hawaiian purchasers accounted for a fairly substantial amount of the transactions (~33%+), the proportions were significantly higher on the less-inhabited islands of Lanai and Molokai, though interestingly enough also on the fairly heavily inhabited island of Maui. Non-individual transactions counted for a very small share, the highest being 5% on Oahu. Niihau and Lanai exhibit no female purchases.

Hawaiian female purchases ranged from 0%-2.1% (Molokai) of total purchases recorded. Hawaiian female purchases (Figure 1)<sup>9</sup> were initially infrequent though spiked noticeably around 1880, gradually decreasing until 1915.

Non-Married, Non-Hawaiian female transactions were infrequent though increased dramatically around 1910 (Figure 2) and stayed comparatively consistent until about 1915. Records with the title “Mrs.” recorded ranged from 0%-3.1% (Oahu). Married female (non-Hawaiian) purchases (Figure 3) interestingly were non-existent till 1890, after which the amount of purchases significantly increased and was relatively comparable till around 1910. Of particular interest to this study, Hawaiian females illustrated similar transaction frequency with Non-married, Non-Hawaiian females (Figure 4) till around 1910, when Non-Married, Non-Hawaiian female purchases noticeably increase in frequency, while Hawaiian female purchases essentially cease.

## CONCLUSION

Our preliminary results indicate that there were variations in women’s land purchase by island and over time. The majority of Hawaiian purchases occurred on the smaller, “less-major” islands, with the exception of Maui, the former capital of the Kingdom of Hawaii. While Hawaiian females did not account for a large portion of transactions, they did account for up to 2% (Molokai). Overall, females generally exercised

purchasing power to a slightly greater degree—the highest percentage was on Oahu and Kauai at slightly over 10% of total transactions recorded, which is five times the highest percentage recorded for Hawaiian females. Married women, who typically in Europe at this time were unable to own property on their own (due to marriage union legalities, the male married partner retained ownership) did not exhibit significant purchasing power. However, the presence of any transactions at all for married women suggests that the typical social norms of Europe may not have applied as strictly in Hawaii, with up to 3% of all purchases on Oahu made by individuals who identified themselves with the “Mrs.” title. More research is needed to clarify the social dynamics underlying these patterns. Uncovering those socio-political forces is the next step in this research.



Lois M. Takahashi is a Professor in the Department of Urban Planning. She received a CSW Faculty Development Seed Grant in 2008–09 and she gave a presentation at the Works in Progress I symposium on April 29th. Her Graduate Research Assistant is Beth Tamayose, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Urban Planning.

**Author's note:** Figures 1–3 illustrate the number of purchases per category over time. The green bars denote the number of purchases per year below a particular threshold (denoted with a red dotted line), whereas the yellow bars indicate the number of purchases above this amount. The threshold is defined as the mean or average number of purchases observed over the full length of the study period for each category.

## NOTES

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